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OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION IN GUIDANCE PRACTICE VIEWED IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF VOCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY AND RESEARCH.

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SYSTEMATIC EXAMINATION OF THE COUNSELEE AS A PURPOSIVE, GOAL-SEEKING, LEARNING ORGANISM IS ADVOCATED. WHEN OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION IS GIVEN TO A COUNSELEE, IT IS FILTERED THROUGH PHYCHOLOGICAL SETS, ATTITUDES, PRECONCEPTIONS, AND DEFENSES. VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE MUST SELECTIVELY BORROW FROM RELATED BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES. SINCE 1950, A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF GUIDANCE HAS TAKEN PLACE. CHILDREN ACQUIRE VALUE SYSTEMS WHICH INFLUENCE THEIR CHOICE OF OCCUPATIONS. JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS HAVE LIMITED AND QUESTIONABLE INFORMATION ABOUT OCCUPATION AND ARE NOT READY FOR COUNSELING ABOUT SPECIFIC VOCATIONAL CHOICES. WORK HAS LITTLE MEANING FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH. AMERICAN YOUTH IS ESTRANGED FROM OCCUPATIONAL LIFE, AND DEVELOPS BIASES AGAINST WORK FIELDS. IMPROVED OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION USAGE MAY INCLUDE--(1) ELEMENTARY COUNSELING, (2) ORIENTATION TO WORK IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND (3) EXPERIMENTAL WORK ON THE EFFECT OF ATTITUDES AND EMOTIONAL STATES ON PERCEPTION. (THIS DOCUMENT WAS PRESENTED AT THE CONFERENCE ON OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION AND VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE, PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA, MARCH 11-13, 1966). (SK)

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Occupational Information in Guidance Practice

Viewed in the Perspective of Vocational Development Theory and Research*

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In the early years of World War II, I recall counseling a student in the Psycho-Educational Clinic at Penn State on matters of curriculum planning and vocational choice. During the course of reviewing the relevant psychometric data, I presented the subject with his profile on the Strong Vocational Interest Blank and undertook an interpretation of his score pattern. Among other results, I reported that he scored in the A category on the aviator scale and gave what I believed to be a properly circumspect interpretation. I was totally unprepared for what ensued. The young man, silent and as I recalled later a bit sullen up to this point, erupted with the charge that I was part of a national scheme to whip up fervor for the war effort against Germany by attempting to induce students to enter the Air Force. It turned out that the client was of German extraction, that he had acquired strong feelings of loyalty toward his ancestral fatherland, and bore a deep resentment against American involvement in the war with Germany. It is hardly necessary to report that my counseling of this student was not an unalloyed success.

Anyone with substantial practice in the vocational counseling of youth has met the exasperating experience of helping his client marshal and analyze relevant facts bearing on the estimated appropriateness of a vocational plan, let us say, for example, the choice of engineering as a career, and its projected implementation, of having identified in the process a number of variables and contingencies strongly suggesting a low probability of success in

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CG 000 426

the chosen field, and of hearing the student say, at the close of the interview, something along the following lines: "It's just like you said. Engineering is a great field for the person who is really sold on it. You can be anything you want to be if you really try hard enough."

A counselor whose ears are assaulted by a summary interpretation such as this may wonder, first what it was he really said to the client and, secondly, whether the client was indeed listening. He has good cause to question the consumer process on both counts, but more importantly, he has warrant to question the communication process.

For some time, it has been quite evident that the strategy of the typical counselor of the past as a disseminator of occupational information has employed the untested assumption that the client is analogous to a dispassionate and rational data-processing apparatus, capable of assimilating data in a distortion-free manner, storing and retrieving relevant facts from its memory drum, and of performing a straight forward albeit complex analysis of the problem of choice making. Many will recognize this general assumption as having tacitly underlain Frank Parsons' description of the method of arriving at a vocational choice by "true reasoning." The delineation of Parsons' method as given by John Brewer, the historian of the vocational guidance movement, and a reading of the vocational guidance literature of the past make it abundantly clear that concerns with improving the occupational information process has focused chiefly on the cognitive or information processing aspects of the client's behavior and objective and factual characteristics of the information to be presented to him as a basis for choice. Attention has only rarely been given to the efficacy of occupational information as a modifier of attitudes and of the psychological conditions of the

organism (motives, freedom from perceptual defenses, etc.) which are prerequisite to his capacity to receive, process, and use information in the hoped-for manner.

What has been lacking, then, has not been so much the matter of attention to the stimulus properties of occupational information as a systematic attack on the nature of the counselee as a purposive, goal-seeking, learning organism. Despite the current vogue for discovering similarities between brains and computers, there is need to recognize that when occupational information is fed into the viable, sensate machine that is the human organism as a basis for personal planning and decision making, that information is filtered through an already existing complex of psychological sets, attitudes, preconceptions, and defenses. The nature of the process by which humans use such information for human ends is as yet only dimly understood. It may relieve the thwarted counselor to displace his hostility by pointing to the inadequacy of the information in his files or by charging the obstinacy of his client. Yet this is hardly a satisfactory substitute for undertaking a critical re-examination of vocational counseling as a special problem in learning theory. It is in understanding vocational guidance sufficiently in <u>behavioral terms</u> that we fail. While we may acknowledge the early contributions of occupational information specialists, vocational educators, and trait-measurement (i.e., testing) psychologists, the hard fact remains that the approaches of all of these vocational guidance specialists have flourished outside the mainstream of the behavioral sciences, neither borrowing from them nor contributing to them in significant degree. The insights to be derived from a study of principles of motivation, perception, and learning have, until very recently, been cheerfully ignored. Fortunately, a trend is

underway to redress this error. While one can agree with Brayfield's observation that vocational guidance as a practicing field has necessarily lacked an independent research tradition, it can and must nonetheless borrow selectively from the conceptual and analytical tools and the pertinent precepts of the related behavioral sciences, notably the discipline of psychology, and it has begun to do so in an encouraging manner.

I do not intend in this brief paper to discuss in detail the concepts in the psychology of vocational development which have come into prominence since about 1950 and which have led us to reconceptualize both the nature of occupational behavior and the tasks and problems of vocational guidance. These principles are probably well known to many in this audience. Still, a brief reminder of some of them is in order since they provide one kind of promising framework for rethinking the role and function of occupational information in guidance practice.

Life stages concept. Charlotte Buehler's notion of arranging the study of evolving behavior according to a sequence of psychological life stages has provided a developmental thrust to the analysis of occupationally relevant acts in youth. We are apt to say today, for example, that vocational plans and decisions are not single events but part of an ongoing process of development and we show a predilection in the formulation of theory, if not always in empirical research, for longitudinal studies, that is, for studies of the growth of vocational concepts, aspirations, and commitments in youth and man over the span of time.

Vocational development tasks. Borrowing both from the life stages concept and Havighurst's notion of the developmental task, we have moved from fixed preoccupation with the act of vocational choice per se toward an identification of the motives and related problem-solving behavior which typify

the individual at each life stage in his particular social milieu. When we shift our focus in this manner, we appreciate that it is not necessary to delay the study of occupational behavior in youth until he confronts his first, formal choice point in the decision chain as, for example, the choice between the office practice, machine shop, and college preparatory tracks at the end of the ninth grade. As we shall see, we can study with considerable profit the occupationally relevant behavior exhibited in younger subjects and we can consider its lessons for the vocational guidance of youth, including the improved uses of occupational information.

Career pattern concept. Despite a durable popular myth, most individuals do not make a single, fixed career choice. They make several. Industrial sociologists such as Delbert Miller have traced what is called the career pattern of industrial workers, that is, the movement from position to position within the career history. The career pattern concept is related to the study of occupational mobility but goes beyond it in that it assumes a causal chaining of decisions in the pattern, causes that are both internal (psychological) and external (socioeconomic), and furnishes a perspective on the meaning and character of occupational adjustment that the study of isolated job choices does not afford. Vocational development theorists have extended the concept of the career pattern downward in time to include the series of tentative and often unstable choices and aspirations that may long precede the subject's formal entry into the labor force.

Occupational choice and identity formation. Borrowing from self-concept theory, the psychology of vocational development postulates that the young child begins to develop an image of himself as a person as he interacts with and gets feedback from society. For most individuals, the self concept

becomes increasingly more stable with age. The striving for a vocational role, or the making of a vocational choice, is now commonly viewed as a search, and not by any means a wholly conscious search, for a social and economic role which will yield the autonomy and perquisites of adulthood but which, above all, will be consonant with one's image of self. In Super's often quoted terminology, purposive behavior which has as its manifest the making of curricular and vocational choices is psychologically an attempt at the implementation of the maturing self-concept.

The taking of occupational roles. In the complex, time-extended process by which the child becomes socialized with respect to the values, customs, expectations, and coping mechanisms of his primary reference group and of the larger subculture, he must learn his behavior modes from those around him. As he grows, he imitates the behavior of older children and of adults who thus become his role models. In part, he is learning to master his developmental tasks and, in part, he is exploring roles and experiences to learn both the kind of person he is and aspires to become. Some of these role-taking experiences become important in shaping his emerging concept of self as a potential worker, and it seems quite plausible that the manner in which he assimilates, values, and uses occupational information comes under the influence of the kind of person he perceives himself to be or that he projects as an ideal self.

A Capsule Review of Research Findings in Vocational Development

Certain of the findings of studies that have been set in the context of vocational development have begun to give us a basis for constructing reasonably dependable generalizations about the nature of occupational thinking and motivation in youth. More than that, they offer some broad intimations

of the functions of occupational information in vocational guidance. At a December, 1965 conference on Vocational Aspects of Counselor Education, sponsored by The George Washington University under contract with the Division of Adult and Vocational Research, U. S. Office of Education, I undertook a selective resume of pertinent research results. I wish here to paraphrase briefly what I said about four of these lines of evidence before advancing some additional findings which, in my judgment, cannot be ignored in any tactical decisions involving the use of occupational information in guidance.

1. Many of the traits and dispositions which are learned in the flux of early childhood, while not immediately related to work roles, have relatively clear implications for subsequent occupational behavior. An example is the cultivation of achievement motivation which is tentatively seen as correlated with the subsequent level of occupational aspiration and with the standard-setting character of the individual's work performance.

2. Children begin early to acquire a valuing system about occupations which is related to the order in which they rank fields of work and which also influences to a significant degree their later designation of preferred occupational roles. The job ranking system they acquire from adult society is that based on the prestige or social status of occupations but the manner in which this set of occupational values is acquired is not yet well understood. What is clear, however, from the findings of studies such as that by O'Dowd and Beardslee is that many individuals are influenced in their occupational preferences more by the perceived power of a job to confer a life style upon the individual who holds it than by its formal work duties and characteristics. As a matter of fact, it is very probably true that large numbers of young Americans are much more sophisticated about the status conferring potency of

occupations than about the actual work operations involved. If, as we think, many youth are attracted to and repelled by jobs on the former basis rather than the latter, we are compelled to call into question a number of premises underlying the conventional development and use of occupational information materials.

3. The occupational information possessed by junior high school students is both sharply limited and of questionable reliability. Owing to cultural restrictions, the range of occupations of which rural youth has knowledge is even more limited than for urban youth. In practical terms, this difference is manifested in the expression of preferences among rural youth for a slender array of unimaginative occupational preferences reflecting a low level of aspiration.

4. Junior high school youth lack psychological readiness for counseling which has as its principal objective the making of specific vocational choices. This, at least, is the conclusion at which Super and Overstreet arrived in their study of the vocational maturity behavior of ninth-grade Career Pattern Study boys. Super and his associates contend that it is more fruitful to construct measures of a sense of planfulness when assessing the vocational development of junior high school youth than it is to employ conventional measures of maturity such as the judged appropriateness and realism of their stated vocational preferences. By a sense of planfulness is meant such behavior as the subject's avowed acceptance of responsibility for his personal planning and evidence of his specific constructive attempts to get information about his preferred occupation. In this regard, promise is seen in such developmentally oriented instruments of occupational behavior as John Crites' paper-and-pencil Vocational Development Inventory and Gribbons and Lohnes'

Readiness for Vocational Planning scales, a partially structured interview approach. Those interested in the vocational aspects of youth counseling should watch with close interest the ongoing research on these two experimental instruments.

Recent research has brought to light a number of additional characteristics of the occupational behavior of youth. I should like to comment at least briefly upon some of these phenomena.

5. For youth who are seriously disadvantaged by cultural deprivation the prospect of work has a meaning which is sharply divergent from the meaning it potentially holds for more favored youth. Work to the disadvantaged is not a virtue, nor necessarily a means to status, recognition, or upward social mobility, -- merely a possible means of raw economic survival. Because the adults in their lives have been "losers" in the occupational world, such children have usually been cut off from the folkways of work and from the household shoptalk about work. Work has little meaning for them. They are ordinarily incapable of long-term planning and training for occupational qualification and advancement, that is, of long-range vocational planning as a form of delayed gratification of social needs. They are marked, in the words of Himes, by a "trained unreadiness for smooth transition from family, school, and neighborhood to the social world and technical roles or work." Obviously vocational counseling and the application of occupational information tools in vocational guidance must have different impact and meaning for such children as compared with culturally favored youth.

6. The increasing complexity of modern industrial society has tended to estrange American youth from occupational life. While work at one time had

familiarity in the everyday experience of young people, they often have little direct confrontation with it today, find it difficult to acquire occupational roles, and meet societal sanctions that systematically exclude large numbers of young people from work through the devices of heightened age and educational barriers. In comparison with an earlier generation and in terms of how much one be known and needs to be known about the world of work, there is a marked degree of occupational illiteracy among today's youth, a fact directly or obliquely acknowledged by such writers as Riesman, Coplow, Paul Goodman, and others. Lacking opportunity for direct experience with work and facing a prolonged adolescence and economic dependency stage, much of youth appears indeed to have great need for vicarious, symbolic, and simulated occupational encounter.

7. Evidence appears to be accumulating that American youth, rather than developing a set of positive interests in fields of work, develop instead a progressive set of blocks against work fields which prematurely restricts the effective range of choices they are willing to consider. This finding which I have elsewhere referred to as the phenomenon of "subjective occupational foreclosure" has been independently noted by Louis Tyler, Richard Hilton, and Theodore Ogden, among others. Nelson's findings have shown that the narrowing process begins to set in as early as the third grade. The number of negative reactions to occupations increases with age relative to the number of positive reactions. Nelson vigorously advocates early exposure to the occupational world through the school as one means of combatting negative occupational foreclosure in children.

Transmitting Occupational Information in Guidance: Implications from Theory and Research

We have lived for many years with the paradox that occupational information is one of the most fundamental aspects of vocational guidance yet, in practice, remains one of the most notoriously ineffective ones. I have suggested in this paper that a resolution of the dilemma lies to a significant degree in an improved understanding of the counselee as a learner. There is need for specifying more clearly the planned behavioral outcomes of vocational guidance. Beyond that, there is need for evolving the techniques by which, through occupational information and other media, counselee attitudes and motives are appropriately modified and rational planning and choosing skills are systematically generated. While it is beyond the scope of this presentation to deal at length with such methods of behavior change, I wish at least to sketch some of the broad outlines of an improved technology of occupational information usage.

1. It is patent that, through the mechanisms of incidental learning and social imitation, attitudes about work as a social institution (and attitudes about particular classes of occupations) begin to be acquired at an early age. Lifton has contended that, while work values are already discernible in younger children, elementary school teachers are typically ill-informed about the occupational structure and unqualified to help their pupils gain realistic concepts of work. Growing interest in elementary school counseling may provide a partial solution. Some materials appropriate to the elementary school level are available. The Joint Council on Economic Education has been developing curriculum notions

about work and the economy for the entire curriculum, elementary and secondary. I understand that Harold Munson at the University of Rochester has been at work on the development of elementary school level curriculum materials. A few years ago, Lifton developed the Widening Occupation Roles Kit for grades 6 through 9. Beyond the development of materials, there is a pressing need to test them empirically in the setting for which they have been intended. The only instance I am aware of in which this has been done concerns Martin Katz' combined text-workbook, You: Today and Tomorrow, but Katz' material was designed, of course, for junior high school students.

2. What knowledge we currently possess about the vocational development of younger children suggests that the aim of occupational information in the elementary grades should be concerned with orientation to the world of work rather than with specific problems of vocational planning. I have already noted the tendency of contemporary youth to be detached and cut off from formal work and to acquire negative psychological sets toward many categories of work. While it seems quite probable that productive labor in general was more highly regarded by both youth and adults in previous generations, the valuing of work is now more likely to be related specifically to the ability of a given occupation to bestow social position and the power to consume goods and services. If one accepts the thesis that appreciation of the institution of work potentially contributes to interpersonal harmony and to more responsible citizenship, one may then argue that the school, through the curriculum and other means, should, as I have proposed elsewhere (a) "promote the valuing of work as a social institution," and (b) "cultivate a deepened

regard for the world of work and especially the work of others." Whether the schools can be successful in achieving these aims is by no means a certainty inasmuch as the child and the adolescent are both exposed to pervasive elements of cynicism about work which are negatively reinforcing. Distorted concepts of work are often learned within the classroom as are negative attitudes toward jobs and toward man the worker. As a start in reducing the sense of alienation from work, I suggest the planned use of conceptual systems of the organized work world in order to teach the interrelatedness of work and the interdependency of all workers in a complex industrial society, an interdependency by which work talents and efforts of all in the labor force contribute indispensibly to the general economic welfare. Greenleaf, Brewer and Lenly, and others have tried to do this through textbook units on occupations and I have tried to do it with college freshmen by means of several conceptual schemes, including the job classification system on which the Dictionary of Occupational Titles is based. Perhaps efforts in this direction need to be more imaginative and vigorous and, certainly, more evaluative testing of the efficacy of such occupational information techniques is called for.

3. Surprisingly little experimental work has been done on the effect of predisposing attitudes and emotional states on the subject's perception, distortion, internalization, and selective forgetting of occupational data. Both in the development of occupational information and in its counseling use, we continue to operate pretty largely on the basis of cognitive models of our consumers, namely, our students and counselees. In 1954, Ruesalem proposed that occupational information in counseling be incorporated into a self-concept theory model. He asserted that the client's use of occupational information involves selective attention and that the client

views occupational data in ways that do not assault his concept of self. Effective counselors realize, of course, that occupational information must be evaluated not only objectively in terms of criteria such as content, comprehensiveness, readability, and so forth, but equally importantly, in terms of its attitude-related and motive-related meanings for the counselee. Nonetheless, few if any dependable empirically-based guidelines now exist for the practicing counselor with respect to how occupational information is to be introduced and integrated with the other input variables of counseling. And there is little to tell us how such information can be effectively communicated against a backdrop of existing psychological sets and resistances. But at the expository level, at least, a commendable beginning has been made on this problem by Samler and Patterson in their analytical treatment of occupational information in counseling as set forth in their chapters in NVGA's fiftieth anniversary commemorative volume.

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4. The problem of communicating notions about the ethos of work.

5. Behavioral counseling approaches to the use of occupational information.

NOTE: Points 4 and 5 above will be briefly discussed by the presenter, time permitting.